



University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

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February 9, 2015

To: Thomas Adams, Executive Director
Instructional Quality Commission
Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division (CFIRD)
California Department of Education
1430 N Street, Room 3207
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: Ramdas Lamb, Associate Professor

Dear Dr. Adams and members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

I am writing in reference to the proposed history and social science frameworks in use for California schools and would like to express concern regarding the current world history framework on India. While some elements are sound, others are outdated and thus inaccurate. Several examples of the latter can be found in lines 558-563, dealing with both the Vedas and the Aryans. The dates given for the Vedas are from 1500 BCE at the earliest. In contrast, several references in the texts tell of the existence of the great Saraswati River, which archaeological evidence suggests had dried up by 1900 BCE. The dating of the Vedas being used in the frameworks, then, is inaccurate. As for the Aryans, the frameworks claim that most scholars believe they "entered India from Central Eurasia in the second millennium BCE." When one also considers that most genetic studies of the supposed phenomena find no evidence of DNA from outside the region entering the gene pool anywhere near that time period (late Pleistocene is more likely), it should be apparent that the sources used in developing the frameworks of the history of the region provide an inaccurate understanding.

Another example is found beginning on line 570, which calls "Brahmanism" as a "belief system." First, this is not an indigenous label or understanding, and it provides an inaccurate portrayal of the complexity to the beliefs and practices of the time period, one in which there were diverse indigenous approaches.

In lines 583-90, there is a discussion of what has become known as the "caste system." Because of both the complexity of understanding of the system and the way it has often been misused by outsiders such as Christian missionaries to denigrate Hinduism, your

presentation does the tradition a disservice in perpetuating an inaccurate depiction. Although the caste system is referenced in various ancient texts, these were written by and for the urban elite. Most villagers, on the other hand, were illiterate and had little to do with city life and society. Actually, it was the *jajmani* system of “*jatis*” (an occupation-based classification of sub-groups), that was the more prevalent system. The frameworks, however, give no discussion or even mention of this system, which has long had a far greater influence in Indian society. In referencing the caste system, you should provide sufficient information that ensures both teachers and textbook publishers have an accurate understanding of this complex, evolving social system.

Finally, at least some discussion of philosophies such as ahimsa, reincarnation, dharma, and karma as key to Hinduism warrant mention for teachers as topics worthy of understanding for students. These are, after all, the concepts that have become most known and popular in the west, and students should be made aware of their origins.

I urge you to consider adopting framework revisions suggested in the public comment process by groups such as the Hindu American Foundation and the Uberoi Foundation Institute for Curriculum Advancement. Not only do these groups provide necessary input on indigenous understanding, but also because their recommendations are grounded in valid scholarship.

You may contact me for more information if you wish by email at: ramdas@hawaii.edu

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ramdas', with a stylized flourish at the end.